

B-1 commemorates its 20th at Dyess

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6/29/2005 - **DYESS AIR FORCE BASE, Texas (AFPN)** -- It has more than 20 years of service, has more than 100 world records for speed, payload, range and time to climb and has become the bomber of choice for warfighters in all theaters -- but the B-1B Lancer is just getting started.

The multimission bomber commemorates its 20th anniversary since its arrival here June 29, 1985.

The Lancer's long-established history, its advanced technological capabilities and combat service has made it the bomber of choice and continues to keep it the bomber of choice, officials said. However, the bomber had to overcome several obstacles before becoming operational and making its official debut.

The Lancer's history began in the 1960s when the need for a long-range conventional multirole bomber arose to replace the B-52 Stratofortress in its Cold War role to deliver nuclear weapons and penetrate the Soviet defenses.

"The vision of the new bomber was revolutionary in every aspect, (including) its design, its mission and the weapons it would carry," said George Jackson, an instructor pilot with the 28th Bomb Squadron here. "This airplane was going to be the first high- and low-altitude bomber that we had ever designed. It was also going to be the first high-speed, low-speed, high and low altitude-capable bomber as well as multipurpose from the standpoint of conventional and strategic weapons delivery."

But the bomber program had a lot of "back and forths" during its development, said Robert Butler Jr., a B-1B site manager who was one of the first cadre at the training school here. Shortly after the initial development contract was awarded and progress began with the testing of the first B-1A prototype in 1974, the program was terminated for a variety of reasons including the growing costs of the program.

However, program developers were "still flight testing the B-1 and working the bugs out because the feeling was that we would eventually have to buy it even though the president canceled it," Mr. Butler said. "And then (President Ronald) Reagan came, and one of the first things he did was regenerate the bomber program. From then on, it was like a speeding train."

In 1981, President Reagan reinstated the B-1 bomber program and designated it to produce the B-1B prototype. Despite the initial delay of being canceled, the program quickly began rolling again -- first with the announcement that the Air Force would buy 100 B-1Bs and a contract to develop the bombers in 1982.

Following its first flight in October 1984, the big day came June 29, 1985, when the Star of Abilene's 1:55 p.m. arrival here with an air show that corralled more than 45,000 people to the flightline here.

"It was the big event," Mr. Butler said. "Everything was planned around the B-1B that day."

Soon after the bomber gained its conventional role and stood its last nuclear alert in 1997, it became battlefield commanders' weapon of choice, Mr. Butler said.

"Since the B-1Bs role in Operation Desert Fox (in 1998), battlefield commanders asked for that weapon above any else because of the virtual delicatessen of the weapon bays, the precision weapons we use," Mr. Butler said.

"There isn't another plane out there that can do what we can do," said Maj. Derek Leivestad, an instructor pilot with the 28th BS. "There are other planes out there that can carry the same types of weapons -- there's



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DYESS AIR FORCE BASE, Texas -- The first operational B-1B Lancer in the Air Force, also known as the Star of Abilene, sits on display here. The base celebrated the bomber's 20th anniversary June 29. (U.S. Air Force photo by Airman 1st Class Alan Garrison)

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no doubt about that -- however, there's nobody out there that can carry as many of them or as mixed a load."

In 2005, the bomber's software was upgraded increasing its weapons load and variety capability.

The Lancer can carry 24 Global Positioning System-aided joint direct attack munitions at one time. It can also carry a combination of 24 Mk-84 2,000-pound bombs; 8 Mk-85 naval mines; 84 Mk-82 500-pound bombs; 84 Mk-62 500-pound naval mines; 30 cluster munitions; 30 wind-corrected munitions dispensers, 24 AGM-158 joint air-to-surface standoff missiles or 12 AGM-154 joint standoff weapons.

The bomber most recently proved itself in operations Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom.

"The mission effectiveness rates for the B-1 were in the high 90 percents for all the conflicts it supported, which was unprecedented, and nobody believed the B-1 could do it," Major Leivestad said.

As the base commemorates the B-1B's anniversary, people here said they salute the Lancer and all the people who make and have made the bomber what it is now.

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